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## JACK ANDERSON

# Aeroflot Is Said To Aid Soviets' Spy Operations

Evidence locked in secret CIA files suggests that the Soviets knew exactly what they were doing when they shot down an unarmed civilian airliner that had strayed off course into Soviet airspace.

The bitter irony is that Soviet airliners are probably guilty of the aerial espionage in which the Soviets wrongly thought the doomed South Korean airliner was engaged.

A CIA report, stamped "Secret" and barred from foreign distribution, claims that Aeroflot, the Soviet airline, "is a significant instrument of Soviet intelligence collection."

The report cites "a prolonged employment of Aeroflot by the Soviets for both counterintelligence and foreign collection purposes." The Soviets are suspected, for example, "of using Aeroflot for signal intelligence collection operations."

Once, the Soviets rescheduled an Aeroflot flight "to permit coverage of a U.S. command post exercise." Another time, an Aeroflot airliner, flying over the United States, "was viewed as having a collection mission since signal intelligence intercept gear was observed on the aircraft."

Yet there has never been the slightest suggestion that Aeroflot planes should be shot down when they intrude into U.S. airspace with their espionage gear.

Just about every Aeroflot flight, suggests the CIA, has an ominous passenger on board—a KGB officer. "On domestic flights over the U.S.S.R.," reports the CIA, "the KGB officer probably acts in a security capacity to inform on the activities of foreigners or to block attempts by them to gather intelligence."

"On overseas flights, the function of the KGB officer would be to maintain control over the flight crew and prevent any possible defections. The use of Aeroflot for cover, coupled with the KGB presence on most flights and the inherent collection capability of the aircraft, corroborates the threat that this airline constitutes . . .," concludes the secret CIA report.

The Soviets probably attributed to the South Korean airliner what their own civilian planes would do over someone else's territory. The airliner strayed dangerously close to the Kuril Islands, which are loaded with Soviet military installations.

The islands contain early warning radar sites, surface-to-air missile sites, military airstrips, a maritime base and a geophysical seismographic observatory which, according to a secret Defense Intelligence

Agency report, "is involved in anti-submarine warfare-related projects in the northern Kurils."

Concludes the DIA report: "The military significance of the four islands is considerable."

The South Korean airliner passed north of the Kurils over the Sea of Okhotsk. The Soviets are extremely sensitive about this area, according to classified papers obtained by my associate Dale Van Atta.

The United States takes the position, states a top-secret CIA report, "that the Sea of Okhotsk is an international body of water." Yet any U.S. penetration into the area invariably draws a Soviet response. "Such operations usually provoke reconnaissance and surveillance by Soviet naval aircraft and ships," notes the report.

Intelligence sources insist the Soviets couldn't possibly have been confused about the identity of the South Korean airliner. They deliberately, cold-bloodedly shot it down, these sources say, probably in the belief that it was engaged, as an Aeroflot airliner would be, in extra-curricular spying.

How can U.S. intelligence be so sure this wasn't a case of mistaken identity? The United States operates a top-secret intelligence post, the 6920th Electronic Security Group, on Japan's northernmost island, Hokkaido. It monitored the entire tragedy from close range.